The Bear Study Guide

The Bear by William Faulkner

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Introduction

Although several versions of "The Bear" exist, the one most commonly read comes from William Faulkner's 1942 novel, *Go Down, Moses*. Isaac (Ike) McCaslin, the young hero of "The Bear," remains a central figure throughout the novel as well. The story of a young man's development against a background of vanishing wilderness was well received by readers and critics alike. Today it appears in many anthologies. Faulkner did not add the long fourth section of the story until it appeared in *Go Down, Moses*, and he argued that its primary role was to connect the story to the rest of the novel. If read alone, the fourth section of "The Bear" should be omitted. Yet the fourth section puts into context the relationships and events that contnbuted to young Ike's upbringing in the woods. It is learned that Major deSpain and Colonel Compson received their commissions in the Civil War, an historical event of resounding importance In addition, Ike's decisions in the fourth section are primarily due to the lessons he has learned in the wilderness. Thus the fourth section shows how he translates the morality of the woods into social responsibility. Whether read alone or as part of the longer novel in which it eventually appeared,' "The Bear" provides a unique glimpse into the Mississippi region where Faulkner, himself an avid hunter, was born and raised. As Ike McCaslin learns about his family's past, Faulkner portrays a varied cast of characters in a tale about the wilderness destroyed by human greed, and a man who refuses to further this destructive trend.

Author Biography

Born on September 25, 1897, William Faulkner belonged to a once-wealthy family of former plantation owners. Raised among a circle of acquaintances similar to General Compson and Major deSpain, Faulkner knew first-hand about life in the South after the Civil War. His fictional Yoknapatawpha County, and its county seat, Jefferson, represent the actual Lafayette County and the city of Oxford, Mississippi, where Faulkner lived most of his life. Although Faulkner dropped out of high school and never finished college, he was a passionate fan of poetry and originally planned to become a poet. He worked for a brief period as a bank clerk before being accepted into the Royal Canadian Air Force during World War I, although he never saw combat action.

After working in a New York bookstore and as the university postmaster at the University of Mississippi, Faulkner began publishing stories and poems His novel *The Sound and the Fury* brought him to the attention of several critics. Once he realized his talent for fiction writing, Faulkner became a prolific writer, publishing almost twenty novels and several short stones in addition to two volumes of poetry. He also wrote screenplays, essays, and newspaper articles. In his later years, Faulkner traveled widely, giving lectures at American colleges as well as in other countries. He won two Pulitzer Prizes for fiction and a National Book Award. He died on July 6,1962.

Much of Faulkner's work concerns the decline of Southern life in the aftermath of the Civil War. Once perceived to be a gracious, genteel society, the South as portrayed by Faulkner consists largely of impoverished descendants of former plantation families eking out a living alongside sharecroppers of African-American descent as well as those fanners who had never been affluent. Although these rural areas may seem isolated from world events such as wars and economic depression, Faulkner's works often mirror outside straggle within his fictional county. "The Bear," for example, creates a sense of disillusionment and grief at the decline of natural man in the face of man-made "progress." The story examines how modern society, with its advanced warfare techniques and increasingly mechanized workforce, threatens to destroy man and nature for good.

Another issue of great concern for Faulkner was the ongoing racism that continued to plague the South. Faulkner hated slavery and the social problems that remained in spite of emancipation, and his works often reflect his ongoing concern. Ike McCaslin shares Faulkner's horror at the idea of slavery. He rejects his inhentance in an attempt to escape his connection to this history.

As a writer of the early part of the twentieth century, Faulkner became an influential figure during the modernist period, a movement characterized by experimental forms of fiction such as interior monologue, multiple narrators, and shifts in narrative time. Each of these characteristics can be found in "The Bear," particularly in section four, which Faulkner labored over for several years after completing the first portion of the hunting story.

Plot Summary

"The Bear" immediately introduces readers to numerous time periods simultaneously. "There was a man and a dog too this time," Faulkner writes, and readers are alerted that at least two time periods are being described in the narrative. The story follows sixteen-year-old Ike McCaslin as he embarks upon his sixth year of an annual hunting trip and the experiences he undergoes during his two weeks in the hunting camp. The narrative weaves between a number of years in Dee's life, from his first hunting trip at age ten to the current year. As Ike ages, the elements of the trip that remain constant are the men he travels with—Major de Spain (owner of the land on which they hunt), General Compson, McCaslin Edmonds, Uncle Ash, Sam Fathers, Boon Hogganbeck, and Walter Ewell—and Old Ben, the "big old bear with one trap-ruined foot" whom the hunters track. After this initial setting of scene, the narration returns to Dee's first hunting trip, where Sam Fathers teaches Ike the code of die wilderness. In one exercise, Sam forces Ike to watch game animals pass in front of him without shooting. Ike gradually learns more about the wilderness in the rest of the first section. One day when he ranges through the woods without a gun, a watch, or a compass, he finally catches a glimpse of Old Ben.

The second section of this story begins three years later. Ike is thirteen and has now killed his first buck and his first bear. "By now, he was a better woodsman than most grown men," according to the narrative. During the hunting trip described in this section, the hunters lose one of their colts to a wild animal. General Compson is sure that the predator is a panther, but Sam Fathers—acknowledged as the most skilled woodsman of the group—is unsure of this. The party traps the animal only to find that it is a "fyce," a wild mongrel dog. Sam decides to keep the dog, whom he names "Lion," in order to help the party corner and kill Old Ben. In November of the next year, Lion tracks the bear down. General Compson shoots the bear and draws blood, but Ben escapes.

The third section of the story takes place the following year, in December of 1883. The weather is too unforgiving to hunt, so the men spend their time in the cabin drinking and gambling. When the whisky runs low, the men send Boon and Ike to Memphis to get more. While in Memphis, Boon and Ike stand out among the city folk because of their dirty hunting clothes. Boon, especially, looks like a wild man, and in the space of fourteen hours he gets drunk twice. The next morning, General Compson decides that Ike will ride the mule the next day because of Ike's superior skill—the mule, unlike the horses, will not bolt at the sight of the bear. Lion tracks the bear and comers him; the bear fights back, and Boon leaps upon its back and stabs it to death. As the hunting party surveys the aftermath of the battle, they find that not only Lion, but Sam as well, are in grave condition, and both soon die. As the chapter closes, Edmonds confronts Boon about Sam, wondering if Boon has had some part in Sam's death.

The fourth section recounts Ike's learning about his family's history. He and Edmonds, who has raised Ike since his father died, discuss their common ancestor Carothers McCaslin. Studying the family's business documents in their commissary, Ike discovers that Carothers not only was his own grandfather, but also fathered a daughter,

Tomasina, with his slave Eunice. Unacknowledged in the documents but obvious by context is the fact that Carothers also fathered another son, Terrell, by his own daughter Tomasina. Moving backwards and forwards in lime, the narrative describes Ike's efforts to track down Terrell's children—his own second cousins, as closely related to him as Edmonds—and give them the thousand-dollar legacy left to them by Carothers' will. He fails to find one of them (Tennie's Jim) in Tennessee, but does find another, Fonsiba, in Midnight, Arkansas, where she has settled with her black Union Army veteran husband. Ike sets up a three-dollar-a-month pension for Fonsiba out of the legacy and returns to Mississippi. Thinking about the history bequeathed to him by his plantation-owner grandfather, and disgusted by what he sees as his grandfather's crimes, Ike finally, at age twenty-one, declines to inherit the land left to him in his father's will. He thinks about the degraded life of the plantation owner and the pure life of the hunter and chooses the latter. As the section ends, Ike finds out that he does not even have the silver cup full of gold pieces that had been promised him; his uncle Hubert Beauchamp borrowed all of the pieces from the cup and then substituted the cup itself for a coffee-pot, leaving Ike with nothing but I.O.U.'s. His wife, introduced at the very close of the chapter, hopes for Ike to reclaim his inheritance. When Ike refuses to do so, she turns her back to him, symbolic of the chaste marriage which they will then have.

In the final section, Ike returns to Major de Spain's land one more time. The Major has leased a section of the land to a lumber company, and the primeval wilderness that gave Ike his most important education will soon be gone. As the story ends, Ike meets Boon, the killer of Old Ben and the symbol of man's disrupted relationship with nature, under a gum tree. Boon is "hammering furiously at something in his lap" that turns out to be the disassembled components of his gun.

Chapter 1

Chapter 1 Summary

The opening lines of the book introduce the reader to several important characters. The first character is Old Ben, a bear who has become infamous in the forest and has earned himself a human name. Second is a man named Boon who we learn later is the man who kills Old Ben. Next is Sam Fathers, a man that is a mentor to the narrator. Finally, we learn the name of Lion, who is the unloving dog that hunts Old Ben. Sam Fathers, Lion and Old Ben are described as taintless and incorruptible. The boy, Ike, narrating the story is sixteen, and we learn he has been hunting for six years. The boy describes the importance of the wilderness, the presence of alcohol on all of the hunting trips, and that the day in December when Old Ben is caught starts with whiskey.

The narration goes back to when the boy is ten and first learns about Old Ben. Old Ben has one mangled paw, is a legend because of the destruction he has caused, and he has a solitary nature. The bear is described as being absolved of mortality. As a child, Ike watched the men leave for their November hunting trips, and finally at ten he is allowed to join his cousin McCaslin, Major deSpain, and General Compson. Ike describes the drizzly day and sitting with Sam Fathers who is teaching him to hunt. Ike describes this as though he is witnessing his own birth, for he had always imagined the trip and is now finally living it. Ike describes the bad food cooked by a man named Ash and the rough sheets. Ike recalls practicing to aim his gun and learning patience by not shooting.

Once, Sam and Ike see Old Ben walking along, and Sam explains that the bear runs the other bears off because he is the head bear. Back at the camp, Ike describes smelling the odor of beast and fear. There is an injured dog, and Sam explains that the dog had to be brave to be a dog. Sam leaves camp for a while, and the boy begins going to his hunting stand-alone. On the third morning, Ike hears the dogs and the hunt go by. Ike describes dedicating his life to the wilderness to learn patience and humility. Then, Ike hears a shot and learns a buck has been shot.

Sam returns and the two ride together, with Ike on a one-eyed mule that will not be spooked. The two come across Old Ben's paw mark, and Ike describes feeling the eagerness and abjectness in knowing his own fragility in comparison with the timeless woods. The bear is becoming a part of Ike's dreams. Ike and Sam talk about how they need the right dog to be able to hunt Old Ben. Sam says Old Ben is smart, and the boy realizes that the bear has been watching him. The next morning, Ike gets an early start to ride to his hunting spot and has a flashback of the day Sam had placed him practicing holding the gun which was too big for him and recalls the bear watching him. Ike also recalls smelling the odor of fear, which he had been able to recognize even as a little boy. The boy decides that he has look at Old Ben.

In June of the following year, the group returns to the camp to celebrate the birthdays of Major deSpain and General Compson. The boy has a new gun and leaves early in the morning with his compass looking for Old Ben and learning to become a very good woodsman. Sam knows what the boy has been doing and tells Ike that Old Ben has probably been watching him, but stays away because of the gun. The next morning, the boy leaves the gun behind and brings only the compass and a stick for snakes. Ike recalls Sam's advice to be scared but not afraid. At one point during the boy's trip, he realizes that he has become lost. Ike has done all of the navigating Sam taught him to do, and finally he surrenders himself to the wilderness. Ike sits on a log and then sees Old Ben's paw prints. When Ike looks up, he sees Old Ben. Old Ben is not as big as he has always imagined. Old Ben walks away and fades into the wilderness.

Chapter 1 Analysis

Throughout this short novel, the reader will have to understand that William Faulkner was not interested in the chronology of the events, but more involved with the reader understanding the important lessons Ike learns in the wilderness with the aid of Sam Fathers and Old Ben. A few important motifs of this novel include courage, coming of age, freedom, patience, humility and the awesomeness of the wilderness. The boy, Ike, tells of his first hunting trip as though it is like watching his own birth. This shows how important hunting ties in with his coming of age and becoming a man. The reader learns quickly that Sam Fathers is there to help the boy learn about the wilderness. We also learn that Sam is an old man who is the son of a Chickasaw chief and a black slave. The setting of this story takes place after the Civil War in Mississippi and after the period of reconstruction.

Chapter 2

Chapter 2 Summary

The opening line of chapter two is "So he should have hated and feared Lion." However, the narration does not explain who Lion is yet, or why Ike should have these sentiments. We learn that the boy is thirteen now, has killed a buck, and will kill a bear. We learn that Ike has become a very good woodsman and he is very familiar with bear prints. Once the narrator ambushed Old Ben, but the dog he was with was small and foolish and tried to attack the bear. The boy threw down his gun to grab the dog, and there is a moment when the bear stands over him before turning and leaving. Sam comments on the fact that Ike did not shoot and Ike points out that Sam did not either. Sam remarks that the dog was not big enough.

The narration jumps to Ike's fourth summer of going hunting at fourteen when a colt comes up missing. General Compson says a panther got the colt, but Sam never confirms that this is true. Major deSpain thinks it was Old Ben and feels disappointed in the bear. Sam goes home to his hut without commenting, and the next morning he finds the colt. General Compson reads the tracks and thinks it was a wolf, and still Sam makes no comment. As a man looking back, Ike realizes that Sam knew what killed the colt. As an adult looking back, Ike narrates that Sam must have been glad because his life was almost over, for he had no more family alive and he had had to be a Negro for seventy years.

After breakfast that day, the men get ready to hunt. Ike notices a particularly young and foolish dog, and the dogs cannot find the trail. Ike notices that the dogs are baying as if their territory has been invaded rather than like they are on the hunt. Sam remains expressionless. On the second morning, the dogs cannot pick up on the trail again. On the third morning, Sam leads the men to his hut where he has fenced in a dog that is bashing himself against the door like a wild beast trying to escape.

Sam comments this dog will hunt Old Ben; he cannot be tamed. The dog continuously throws himself against the door and they stop feeding him. The dog is described as being part mastiff and part Airedale, weighing ninety pounds, with cold yellow eyes and having the color of a blued gun barrel. The two-week hunting trip is up, but the boy remains with Sam. By the end of one week, the dog cannot move and Sam begins to feed it. The dog's eyes remain cold and he immediately begins slamming against the door again. Boon shows up to take the boy home, and we learn that Sam's plan is to alternate feeding and starving the dog until he can be touched. McCaslin, Ike's older cousin, asks why Sam will do this, and Sam replies that they do not want him tame they only want him to listen. We learn that the dog's name is now Lion.

The November hunting trip arrives again. Ike describes the young, foolish dog running up to Lion and being pawed at by the large dog like a bear. Boon asks if he can touch Lion, and Sam responds that Lion does not care about anything or anyone. Ike

describes the relationship Boon develops with the dog. Boon takes over caring for the dog, feeding him, and even sleeping with him, but Lion does not care. Major deSpain wants to make Lion sleep with the other dogs, but Boon will not listen. Ike knows that Sam could have Lion with him, but feels that the situation is the way it should be and describes Sam as a prince and Boon as a commoner who should care for the dogs.

On the first morning hunting Old Ben, seven strangers from the swamps arrive at the camp to watch the hunt. These men talk about how much of their corn and livestock Old Ben has eaten. Nobody sees Old Ben that day. The dogs were on the trail, but Old Ben got away by going down the river. Ike comments that he did not hear Lion's cry, and Sam says that Lion will never cry he will only growl.

The narration jumps to the following November's hunting trip. It has become tradition to hunt Old Ben on the last day of the trip, and more strangers arrive to watch the hunt. Lion is on the trail and the hounds go in. Ike is trying to run to keep up and watch. General Compson manages to shoot at Old Ben and draws blood. This is the first time anyone has come close to getting Old Ben. Only the one eyed mule will get close to Old Ben, but Boon is riding her. Boon has never been able to shoot anything, and he even manages to miss five times. Boon has to drag Lion back from the hunt. Ike comments that there was a fatality in the events as if it was the last act of a play. Ike restates again that he should have hated Lion, but he does not. Instead, Ike says he feels humble and proud to be able to see the events to the end.

Chapter 2 Analysis

In this chapter, we learn that Ike is growing, maturing and becoming an excellent woodsman and hunter. It is important to note that neither Ike nor Sam attempt to shoot Old Ben. Old Ben symbolizes the nobility of the wilderness and freedom, and neither Ike nor Sam wants to kill the bear because of this reason. Lion, in contrast, is described as an unloving, and uncaring beast. It seems ironic that a grown man like Boon would develop such a close relationship to an untamed animal. This chapter also contains important foreshadowing of events in the following chapter that will lead to the death of both Old Ben and Sam Fathers. This end that Ike refers to is the ending of the play.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 Summary

The narration jumps to a later December, and the men have been in the camp longer than usual. The men are waiting for the weather to warm and soften so Lion can hunt Old Ben. Boon is sent to town to get more whiskey and Ike is sent with him to make sure the whiskey makes it back. Ike now describes Boon as being one quarter Indian, six feet four inches tall, having the mind of a child, and his eyes seem to be without depth. Ike says that Boon has the most ugly face he has ever seen and no trade or profession. Boon's vice and virtue lies in his love of whiskey, but he is very loyal to Major deSpain and Ike's cousin McCaslin. Ike also comments that other dogs not equal to Lion have been killed by Old Ben, including the young foolish one from previous hunts.

Ash, a man who is responsible for cooking for the camp, drives Ike and Boon to the railroad line. Ike describes shaking from the cold. Ash is hassling Boon the entire ride about how the weather will warm up that day and the men will hunt Old Ben without Boon. On the train, Boon talks to the conductor about Lion and Old Ben. The train reaches Hokes, a sawmill with a commissary, and the two catch a train to Memphis. Ike describes how rough and out of place Boon looks. Boon wants a dollar for a drink and Ike gives it to him regretfully. Ike angrily recalls a time when he bought a wild pony, and while the men were trying to load the pony up, Boon let go of the reins. The pony ran off and it was not caught until two days later.

The day warms up and the two get the whiskey, and a Mr. Semmes gives Boon an extra bottle off which he gets drunk. Boon keeps talking to everyone about Lion and Old Ben, and the two miss the first train. Ike recalls the story of Boon aiming to shoot at a black man ten feet away from him but missed and shot a black woman in the leg accidentally. Ike also remembers Boon missing a buck that had run right by him.

Finally, the two are back at camp and there are five guests there waiting to watch the hunt. The next morning it is drizzling and two- dozen strangers have shown up to watch the hunt. Major deSpain wants to put General Compson on the one-eyed mule, but Compson wants Ike to ride her. Ike looks at Lion and thinks about the dog's courage and endurance to kill, but also notices the dog's empty eyes. The dogs get on the trail in the morning, and Lion jumps at Old Ben. Sam says they need to turn Old Ben away from the river, but he manages to get across and they have to follow. When the men get across and catch up to the dogs, Lion is at Old Ben's throat. Boon jumps on old Ben and begins stabbing him in the throat. Lion, Old Ben and Boon collapse simultaneously with Old Ben dead.

Old Ben has battered both Lion and Boon. The men notice that Sam Fathers is lying face down in the mud. Ike does not know how Sam got down; the horse did not throw him and there was no mark on him. Sam is turned over, and he begins mumbling in his

native language, has his eyes open, but he is unable to move. The small group takes the boat back, and Major deSpain asks what happened. Ike is unable to explain what happened to Sam. Boon wants to ride to get a doctor because Lion's guts are spilling out of him. Instead, they send a man called Tennie's Jim for the doctor. Ike is sent to get the wagon to take it to Coon Bridge. Lion and Sam are placed in the wagon, and Old Ben is dragged behind.

The drizzle turns into rain, and the group arrives back at camp. Sam wants to be taken to his hut. Boon carries Sam into his hut and then carries Lion in. When the doctor arrives, Boon wants the doctor to look at Lion before him. The doctor sews up Lion, cleans up Boon and then checks on Sam. The doctor believes Sam is in a state of shock or exhaustion from being in the river and says Sam needs to stay in bed. Ike knows that Sam Fathers will die. The next morning, the men go to look at Old Ben and find fifty-two old bullets in him. The dogs are still afraid to be around the bear.

The sun begins shining bleakly, and the men go check on Sam and find him barely breathing. Hundreds of people come to look at Old Ben. Lion dies at sundown, and Major deSpain breaks camp that night. Boon buries Lion and speaks of the dog as if he was a man. Ike does not want to leave, and his cousin McCaslin tells him that he needs to be back for school. General Compson intervenes and negotiates a way for Ike to stay as long as he gets back by Sunday. General Compson describes Ike as already being an old man learning about life in the wilderness and tracking Old Ben.

On Thursday, Boon drives the men out to the road to return home. Saturday morning, Tennie's Jim rides to get Major deSpain and McCaslin. By Sunday morning, the men are back, and they find Sam dead, wrapped in a bundle, and placed on a platform with four posts. McCaslin confronts Boon and grabs a hold of his gun. The two men face each other gripping opposite ends of the gun and standing over Lion's grave. Boon says he and Ike constructed the platform according to Sam's instructions, and they have been guarding it from wild animals. McCaslin takes the gun, empties the shells and asks Boon if he killed Sam. McCaslin says if Sam had asked him to do it, he would have. Boon stumbles away without answering. Ike gets between the two men and begins crying. Ike tells McCaslin to leave Boon alone.

Chapter 3 Analysis

The novel has been leading up to the inevitable deaths of Old Ben and Sam Fathers that occur in this chapter. Ike is affected by this cold day in December and he can clearly describe the days leading up to it as well the events of the day itself. Sam Fathers has been a mentor and guide for Ike. This chapter also contains an important description of Boon's character as faithful, yet having the mind of a child. This helps explain Boon's relationship with Lion. More importantly, there is a mystery as to the exact cause of Sam's death, and it is questionable what role Boon has played in it.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 Summary

The chapter begins with stating that Ike is now twenty-one, and he and McCaslin have been juxtaposed, or placed side by side, against the tame land for which their grandfather was responsible. The family land has a square wooden building built on it and a separate building. Ike and McCaslin are discussing their heritage and the land they own. Ike refers to ledgers that have tracked business since before the Civil War. Ike comments that the man, who bought the land, his grandfather, bought nothing because the man, who sold it, Ikkemotubbe, never truly owned it. Ike states God intended for man "to hold the earth mutual and intact in the communal anonymity of brotherhood." Ike continues on saying that God wants men to care for the land and not to own it. McCaslin reminds Ike that man was dispossessed of Eden. Ike and McCaslin ponder whether God had seen in their grandfather's descendents people who would set others free.

Ike and McCaslin begin discussing the language of the Bible, and McCaslin says that the men who wrote it were sometimes liars. Ike claims that the men had to write about truth and matters of the heart in terms everyday people could understand. Ike recalls looking through the ledgers and comparing the handwriting of his uncle and his father who were twins. The two brothers moved out of the big house and moved their slaves into it. At that time, there were rumors that their slaves ran wild in the forest at night. The ledgers itemize the purchase of slaves and the chapter contains various entries. Ike reads the ledgers because they are a record of his family, the slaves' lineage, which he claims are as much a part of his ancestry and the land they all shared and on which they worked.

The ledgers reveal a thousand dollar legacy to be given to the son of an unmarried slave girl to be paid when he is twenty-one. Ike believes this money was left because it was easier than his grandfather claiming his son to be black. Ike also believes that there was some sort of love there. However, when they try to pay out the thousand dollars, they cannot find the man to whom it belongs. Ike thinks about the old man and a young girl who was the daughter of slaves who were not field hands. The reader also learns that Ike's uncle remained on the farm to care for McCaslin, while his father fought during the Civil War. Ike also notes that his own handwriting is similar to his grandfather's handwriting.

The narration jumps in time to a scene with a black man who wants to marry a girl who lives on their farm, Fornsiba, who is seventeen. The man says he owns a farm and can care for her. Ike travels to find Fornsiba after her family has heard little from her. Ike finds her being uncared for in a log cabin, and the man is sitting and reading wearing glasses that contain no lenses. Ike tells the man the land is cursed and that he wants the man to work to care for Fornsiba. The man disagrees with Ike saying that it is "a new era, an era dedicated, as our founders intended it, to freedom, liberty and equality

for all." The man goes on to explain he receives a pension. Ike asks Fornsiba if she is all right, and she responds with saying that she is free. Ike goes to a bank and deposits a thousand dollars into the account. The bank will deliver three dollars per month to Fornsiba.

The narration jumps again to a Lucas Quintus who shows up at age twenty-one looking for his inheritance. Ike comments that the grandfather created all of them and must be responsible for them. Ike then describes the land of the south and its history of the natives, slavery and the cotton industry. Ike comments on the Civil War and states that apparently people can learn nothing unless it is through suffering and bloodshed. Ike continues talking to McCaslin, and says that he is trying to explain something that he has to do. Ike questions what could have made the men fight, and McCaslin's response is the love of land and courage. Ike describes the sudden freedom the slaves experienced as well as the way they were unable to cope. Ike comments that there must be wisdom beyond suffering that teaches the difference between liberty and license. The discussion continues describing the strength of preserving the status quo, or state of things, and trying to establish a better future. Ike describes a third race, the next generation and the activities of the Ku Klux Klan. Ike compares his family ledgers to a history of the entire south. Ike comments that blacks will endure because they are better people than the whites are, and whites have never been free.

Both men recollect Sam Fathers. Ike talks of Old Ben as being "fierce and ruthless not just to stay alive but ruthless with the fierce pride of liberty and freedom," and describes Old Ben jeopardizing his freedom in order to savor it. Sam Fathers is described as having learned of humility from being a slave's son, but also learning pride and endurance from being a Chickasaw chief's son. Ike as a boy wanted to learn about humility and pride. The two men recall Ike's experience in the woods with the small dog and how close he was to Old Ben. McCaslin asks Ike why he did not shoot.

McCaslin reads a poem that is written for a girl. McCaslin says the poem is about truth, honor, pride, pity, justice, courage and love. Ike looks at McCaslin thinking of him as a father figure because of how many years are between them. The two men agree that the land is cursed, and then they begin discussing freedom. Ike states that Sam Fathers set him free.

The narration turns to describing a legacy. Ike's father moved into the big house when he married Ike's mother, but over time they were forced to sell off their furnishings and the house looked emptier and emptier. Ike's Uncle Hubert was caught having an affair with his black cook, and she was forced to leave. Ike describes having seen this incident as a child. Ike is supposed to collect the contents of this cup that rattles and is kept locked up when he is twenty-one. Once, McCaslin tried to get Ike to open it when he was a child, but Ike refused. Finally, Ike opens the cup at twenty-one and finds various papers signed by his Uncle Hubert stating that he owes Ike money.

McCaslin insists on giving Ike money, and Major deSpain and General Compson both volunteer to rent Ike a room. However, Compson wants to learn why Ike appears as though he has quit hunting. Ike's money builds in the bank, and he finds a partner, or

mentor, to go into carpentry with. Ike eventually gets married and he is supposed to build a bungalow for his wife. The wife wants to move from their rented room to Ike's farm. Ike describes his wife sleeping with him naked for the first time in order to try to persuade him to take her to the farm. However, Ike says he cannot promise to go back to the farm. The wife responds that he will not get anything more from her, and that if she does not have a son from this then Ike will have to have a son some other way.

Chapter 4 Analysis

This chapter is written in the style of stream of consciousness with tidbits about Ike's heritage. The reader will find that in the context of this short novel, the chapter is difficult to understand. However, a variation of The Bear is also found contained in the longer novel Go Down, Moses and this chapter is more understandable in that context. Some important motifs of the value of the wilderness, truth and freedom in this novel reveal themselves in the discussion between Ike and his cousin McCaslin. Ike is certain that man cannot truly own land and that God had not intended man to do so. This reveals Ike's feeling that the awesome wilderness is to be preserved, and explains some of Ike's rationale for not returning to the farm with his wife. Ike and McCaslin also discuss truth as coming from the heart. The motif of freedom is discussed along with the history of the south and the Civil War and Ike's reflections on the relationships between blacks and whites. It is important to note that Ike states that Sam fathers set him free.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 Summary

Ike returns to the camp one more time before the lumber company moves in. Major deSpain never sees the camp again. However, he allows the other men to use the house and hunt. General Compson and a man named Ewell come up with an idea to lease the camp for hunting. Later, Major deSpain sells the timber rights. Ike decides to go on a final hunting trip and visits Major deSpain in his office. Ike is struck by how differently Major deSpain dresses for his office than he did on the hunting trips. Ike rides his horse to Hoke's and looks about amazed by the progress. Ike takes the train into the wilderness.

Ike recalls how harmless the train had been in the past. There is a brief anecdote about the first time the train ran and a frightened bear climbed up into a tree and would not come down. Major deSpain held up the log train until the bear finally climbed back down. Ike recalls being able to hear the train at camp. Now, however, the train symbolizes the doomed wilderness, and Ike understands why Major deSpain did not go back to the camp and why he will not return either.

The train gets closer to camp, and Ike sees Ash with the reins wrapped about the brake lever, although he has been told numerous times not to do that by Major deSpain. Ash tells Ike that Boon is at camp already. Ike describes entering the solitary woods and recalls a memory of Ash. When Ike killed his first buck and Sam Fathers smeared his face with blood, Ash became very angry and decided to leave the kitchen to go hunt. Ash had his own shells, which were like relics to him, and spoke continuously while he and Ike were hunting. Finally, the two saw a yearling bear, and Ash missed, even though Ike had to give him directions to use the gun. After the bear runs off and the two are collecting the shells, the gun goes off by itself.

Ike begins describing the earth as his mother, Sam as his spirit father, and the woods as his mistress and wife. Ike heads into the wilderness in a direction that as a child, he was not allowed to go, and later he would not have dared to go there by himself. Now, Ike heads in that direction without even a compass and finds the two graves. There is no visible trace of the graves, but Ike finds the tin containing Old Ben's paw, though he does not open it. Ike does not look for Sam's grave. Ike goes to the tree that had supported Sam's platform and finds the tin nailed to the truck that had contained food, tobacco, and the peppermint candy Sam loved. The tin is now empty.

Ike leaves the area describing it as "no abode of the dead because there was no death, not Lion and not Sam: not held fast in earth but free in earth and not in earth but of earth." As Ike is pondering this concept, he comes across a rattlesnake and describes it as old and cursed. Ike recalls Sam taking him into the forest and he becoming a man, when Sam spontaneously uttered the words chief and grandfather.

Ike hears the sound of metal beating on metal and walks towards it. Ike finds Boon hammering at his gun, which is in pieces around him. Boon is sitting below a tree full of what looked like forty or fifty squirrels. Without looking up and recognizing Ike, the frustrated Boon hollers to Ike to get out of there because the squirrels are his. Boon's words mark the ending of the novel.

Chapter 5 Analysis

Ike takes a physical and symbolic trip into the endangered wilderness during this chapter. Ike knows that he will not return to this place, and describes his relationship to the earth as though it is his mother and the woods are his wife and mistress. This reveals the love and reverence Ike feels for the woods. Furthermore, Ike describes Sam as his spirit father. When Ike visits the graves and the place of Sam's platform, he leaves knowing that there is no death. Ike's narration tells the reader that there is no death because there is only a return to the earth, or mother. The end of the novel returns the reader in some ways to where the story began, with Boon hunting and failing. The ending is both sad and somewhat humorous in this respect.

Characters

Ash

Ash is an African-American servant to Major deSpain. He is described in womanly terms and is relegated to tending to camp. After Ike kills his first buck, Ash airs his resentment at not being allowed to hunt. When Major deSpain allows him to go out the next day, Ash shows himself to be an untrained and inept hunter.

Hub Beauchamp

See Hubert Beauchamp

Hubert Beauchamp

Hubert Beauchamp is Dee's uncle. Hubert promised Ike a silver cup full of gold coins as an inheritance; however, he gradually replaced the coins and then the cup with IOU's, Ike rejects his own inheritance on the assumption that the gift from Uncle Hubert would be enough to live on. The worthless inheritance epitomizes the fruitless expectations of many Southern plantation families, most of whom lost their family fortunes in the Civil War.

Uncle Buck

See Theophilus McCaslin

Uncle Buddy

See Amodeus McCaslin

Cass

See McCaslin Edmonds

General Compson

General Compson is a close friend of the McCaslin's and Major deSpain. Compson respects Ike for his woodsmanship and gives him his compass and his silver hunting horn. He also offers to house Ike after Ike leaves the family farm.

Major deSpain

Major deSpain owns the land on which the men hunt. A former officer in the Civil War, Major deSpain now works in a bank and eventually sells off most of the hunting grounds to a logging company.

McCaslin Edmonds

Cousin and guardian of Ike McCaslin, Cass attempts to convince his ward to accept his inheritance. Their complex dialog in part four of the story indicates that he and Ike do share a special bond that allows them to anticipate each other's thoughts, though he is nowhere as near to Ike as is Sam Fathers, While he understands Ike's position in regard to the family's history, Cass views events with a more practical eye. He acknowledges the scandalous role his family has played in Southern history, but is content to let go the burdens of his past.

Sam Fathers

Sam Fathers is part Native American and part African American. Descendant of a Chickasaw chief named Hdkemotubbe, Sam teaches Isaac McCaslin to hunt the former lands of his ancestors. He is struck down mysteriously when Old Ben dies and shortly thereafter asks Boon to kill him and bury him according to Chickasaw tradition. It is Sam Fathers's love of the land and respect for the hunt •that make him an important role model for young Ike. Because he is the descendent of both chiefs and slaves, Sam represents a unique aspect of the human condition; his nobility is checked by the servile role he is given in society.

Fonsiba

A descendant of Carothers McCaslin through her father, Terrel, Fonsiba is entitled to a one-thousand dollar inheritance. She is also a product of his incest with her grandmother, Tomey.

Boon Hogganbeck

Like Sam Fathers in that he is part Native American, Boon possesses none of Sam' nobility, intelligence or hunting skill. Instead, Boon relies on brute strength to kill Old Ben.

Uncle Hubert

See Hubert Beauchamp

Ike

See Isaac McCaslin

Uncle Ike

See Isaac McCaslin

Lion

First captured and subdued by Sam Fathers, Lion is a fearless mongrel hunting dog. Ike and the others know that only Lion is capable of baying an animal as strong and as smart as Old Ben. In finally doing so, Lion inadvertently ends the hunting trips.

Amodeus McCaslin

Ike first learns of his grandfather's sins through a farm ledger in which Uncle Buddy insists that the slave Eunice drowned herself. Uncle Buddy, a lifelong bachelor, cooked and did the housekeeping for himself and his brother Buck until Buck's marriage to Sophonsiba and their subsequent move back into the big house.

Carothers McCaslin

Ike's grandfather, Carothers McCashn, owned a plantation and several slaves. His most important actions as they affect Ike are his adulterous relationship with his slave, Eunice, and his incestuous relationship with their daughter, Tomasina. It is Carothers's role in the family's history, and in the history of the South, to which Ike objects.

Isaac McCaslin

Isaac McCaslin, also known as Ike and Uncle Ike, is the central figure of "The Bear" as well as the larger work, *Go Down, Moses*. The son of Uncle Buck McCaslin and Sophonsiba Beauchamp McCaslin, Ike is the sole hen: to the McCaslin plantation. Orphaned at an early age, Ike is raised primarily by his cousin, McCaslin "Cass" Edmonds. Nevertheless, he considers the part Native-American, part African-American Sam Fathers his "spiritual father." Dee identifies strongly with Sam, whose woodsmanship and hunting skill he eagerly learns. Because of the lessons he learns from Sam Fathers in the woods, Ike chooses to reject his tainted inheritance and live instead the purer life of a carpenter. His business-minded cousin, McCaslin, tries to dissuade him, but Ike will not change his mind. His stubbornness, however, accomplishes little in the way of social progress; his own material deprivation is his longest-lasting achievement. For Ike, that is enough.

Sophonsiba Beauchamp McCaslin

As Buck's wife and Ike's mother, Sophonsiba tries valiantly to maintain her brother's estate as well as restore her husband's plantation. Her attempts to preserve delusions of grandeur contrast with the McCaslins' lack of concern for elegant appearances.

Theophilus McCaslin

Ike's father, Uncle Buck, lost a card game to Hubert Beauchamp and as a result had to marry Hubert's spinster sister, Sophonsiba. Ike is their only child. Along with his twin brother, Uncle Buddy, Uncle Buck lives in a log cabin on the family's plantation and allows his slaves to live in the plantation house. After their marriage, Sophonsiba urges him to restore the house for their own use.

Old Ben

Old Ben, a bear who has eluded pursuers for years, is hunted every year by the hunting club on the final day of their trip. Boon Hogganbeck, with the help of Lion, finally kills him. His death symbolizes the death of the wilderness itself due to the encroachment of civilization and progress. Once he is dead, the group of hunters stop returning to the area.

Tomasina

Daughter of the slave Eunice and Carothers McCaslin, Tomey also bears her father a child, the son named Turl (Terrel).

Tomey

See Tomasina

Tomy

See Tomasina

Themes

Rites of Passage

"The Bear" describes several important rites of passage for Ike McCaslin. The first rites of passage that readers encounter are the hunting rituals marking the various stages of his growth as a hunter. His first hunting trip at age ten, killing his first deer at age twelve, and other important landmarks in his hunting experience are described in the narrative. Ike is well acquainted with the normal progression of the hunter's apprenticeship, and is able to anticipate his experiences before they occur: "It seemed to him that at the age of ten he was witnessing his own birth. It was not even strange to him. He had experienced it all before, and not merely in dreams." Ike is prepared to follow the procedures of his apprenticeship: taking the worst hunting stand on his first trip; Sam marking his face and hands with blood after he kills his first deer; and the long evenings of storytelling. Camping and hunting with the men is itself an important right of passage, an ancient tradition of teaching and camaraderie that links men through stories of great hunters and legendary kills. Rites of passage preserve cultures for the next generation, and Ike's experiences place him at, the end of a long line of skillful woodsmen. Much of Ike's apprenticeship seems to come from nature itself. The bear teaches the boy about the woods as much as Sam Fathers does. The death of Old Ben becomes a sort of graduation ceremony for Ike, indicating the end of this important period of learning in Ike's life. After he returns home, Ike tries to apply his respect for the land and the life it upholds to the world in which he lives. He discovers that his training in the woods does not help him function in society; those lessons prove useless when it comes to dealing with his family history. Rather than forsake his mentors, Sam Fathers and Old Ben, Dee chooses to distance himself from the role his family has left for him in an attempt to emulate the "purer" life of a woodsman.

Race and Slavery

Like many of Faulkner's works, "The Bear" confronts issues of race and slavery directly. Ike's sense of personal responsibility forces him to evaluate not only his own actions but also those of his family. More than anything, the chronicle of slavery found in the commissary ledgers convinces Ike that he must make amends for his family's past. Yet Faulkner does not leave readers with the impression that the social evils of slavery and racism can be righted in any simple way. Ike's attempts to find Eunice's descendants indicates that the struggle is lengthy and complicated. Even the restitution Ike offers is tainted by slavery. Furthermore, Ike makes no attempt to claim them as his kin, suggesting the preservation of racial divisions. Race remains an important part of Sam Fathers's identity as well. Although Sam is highly respected as a hunter and a woodsman, his plight is that of any other freed slave: "For seventy years he had had to be a negro." Sam's situation indicates the degree to which being even part African American determines one's role on the bottom rang of society. The irony of Sam's situation is mentioned throughout the story, and perhaps most notably in the fourth

section, where Ike tells McCaslin that Sam's teachings are what enable him to reject his birthright— the land that is also Sam's birthright. In this section Ike's past runs together in a fragmented narrative style that serves to represent his thoughts as they occur in his mind. Bee's thoughts focus on Sam's mixed bloodlines and on his prior ownership of the land. The stream-of-consciousness narrative presented here reflects the complicated relationships between the native Indian race, the Arican—American slaves, and the white race. In this moment of self-examination Ike feels that the land is no longer rightfully his. His feelings about both the taking of land from the Indians and about slavery cause him to ultimately reject his birthright.

Style

Point of View

While "The Bear" is a third-person narrative, it is told from the point of view of IkeMcCaslin. Yet not all that Ike knows is told. For example, neither Ike nor the narrator ever actually confirms that Boon killed Sam. McCaslin makes this assumption, and Ike, the only witness, lets his statement remain uncontested. Even more complicated are the conjectures of Ike and McCaslin about Eunice's suicide. It is here that the narrator is demonstrated to be not omniscient (all-knowing), but a more limited, and experimental, version of the traditional third-person narrator.

Setting

Set in Faulkner's fictitious Yoknapatawpha County, Mississippi, "The Bear" covers different time periods during Ike McCaslm's youth. Although the first section begins while Ike is age sixteen, most of the section covers Ike's first hunting trips during the fall of 1877 and the summer of 1878. The second section details events of 1879 (Lion's capture) and then two years later (when he nearly bayed Old Ben). Old Ben's death the following year is the subject of the third section. Section four moves from the pre-war days of Carothers McCaslin and forward, through Ike's relinquishing of his estate, to his childless marriage and austere life. The narrative of this fourth section is molded into a fairly understandable order by the events of Eunice's life. A slave bought in 1807, Eunice gives birth to Tomey in 1810 and commits suicide in 1832. Chapter five moves backward in time to Ike's final trip to the hunting camp in 1882.

Symbolism

The most prominent symbol in "The Bear" is, of course, Old Ben. Symbolizing the natural world of which he is a part, Old Ben, by dying, also symbolizes the destruction of nature that the railroad and the foresters bring. Ben's killer, Boon Hogganbeck, represents modern man seeking to wrest nature to his advantage with blind brute strength. Though Boon does succeed in killing Ben, he is finally defeated by a tree full of frantic squirrels, suggesting that the blind destruction of modern man must eventually end in frustration and misery.

Allusion

As with much of Faulkner's work, Biblical allusions in "The Bear" are numerous. Sam Fathers, for example, has been viewed as a Christ figure whose teachings provide a set of absolute truths that Ike must follow. Buck and Sophonsiba are a modern Abraham and Sarah, and Ike functions as the unlikely child born during their old age. This allusion heightens the irony of Isaac's choosing to reject their inherited truths for the teachings of

Sam Fathers. Some references are only subtly presented. The woods full of snakes that Ash warns Ike of in section five depicts an Eden no longer innocent, but only partially pure. The snake, an important symbol in Chickasaw myth, is also hailed as "Grandfather" by Ike. A familiarity with the Bible may help readers understand certain allusions, but the combined effect of these references creates the sense that "The Bear" discusses issues that are not particular to a time and place.

Foreshadowing

The phrase "And so he should have feared and hated Lion" recurs several times in section two of "The Bear," and serves as a foreshadowing of Lion's role in the hunt for Old Ben. The frequent repetition of the phrase is a constant reminder of how the story will end. To read that Lion is to be hated and feared each time readers are told of his strength, competence, and courage is slightly misleading, but it is not Ike or humans who need to fear the dog. Why should Dee hate and fear Lion if he is the best possible dog for helping Ike and the others achieve their goal? The answer is not within the foreshadowing itself, but within the later knowledge of how the story actually does end. Though the men hunt Ben for several years, his actual death signals the beginning of the end of many things. With Ben's death comes the end of the hunting club and the hunting grounds, the end of a wilderness untainted by development and civilization, the end of traditions and rituals carried on by Sam Fathers and others. "And so he should have feared and hated Lion" presents readers with a "20-20 hindsight " perspective in which knowledge of the future' influences looking back at the past.

Modernism

Faulkner's works fulfill several expectations for modernist literature. Modernism is a term used to describe an international artistic movement that began near the start of World War I and continued through World War n. Modernism broke with the traditional narrative forms of realism and naturalism. The modernists played with narrative form and dialogue, attempting to approximate subjective thought and experience. The movement experimented with new ways of seeing things and new ways of communicating. In the art world, this movement was appropriated by painters like Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse. One of the most striking characteristics of Faulkner's works, and of modernism in general, is the experimentation with narrative time. While the first three sections of "The Bear" seem fairly straightforward, section four moves back and forth in time with little indication of where the story is going next. Section four also presents a shift in technique. Instead of the fairly simple sentences used in the other sections, section four uses long confusing sentences that may span several paragraphs as well as different time periods. In fact, the whole section takes up almost half the story and yet contains only one hundred sentences. These passages approximate interior monologues, as if the narrator and the characters were talking to themselves without bothering to make sense to any listener. Because of these experiments, some find Faulkner's work frequently difficult to read and understand. Many readers have

concluded this confusing technique represents Faulkner's views on the complexity of modern life.

Historical Context

Emancipation

Though the 1862 Emancipation Proclamation freed the slaves, their economic conditions were dire, as inequalities kept them from many jobs and educational opportunities. Southern states, bitter upon losing their bid for secession, attempted to deal with emancipated slaves by passing laws known as the "Black Codes." These laws, effectively perpetuating the racial segregation and degradation formerly applied to slaves, kept the ex-slaves from achieving economic opportunity and fair judicial process almost as thoroughly as before Emancipation. Congress, however, refused re-admittance to the Union to those states who would not ratify the Thirteenth Amendment, which abolished slavery, and the Fourteenth Amendment, which guaranteed civil liberties to all citizens. By 1877, the plans for Reconstruction were completed. Rather than integrate African Americans into society, however, the South erected a system of segregation that supposedly provided separate but equal opportunity for freed slaves and their descendants. "White supremacy" undercut any sense of fairness as the South began to rejoin the Union. Conditions had improved very little by Faulkner's day. Segregation still kept African Americans from entering the better schools and from securing jobs, and they were still in frequent danger of violence and humiliation.

Big Industry

The United States was a very different place at the conclusion of the Civil War. The agricultural South was virtually destroyed, while the industrial Northeast had grown strong. The railroad industry exploded as opportunists in the Midwest and the West sought ways to get their products—primarily beef and grain—to market. Owned largely by New Yorkers, the railroad received free land and millions of dollars in loans. The bankers, led by financier J. P. Morgan, could not get rich fast enough, nor could the railroad-owning families of Vanderbilts, Goulds, and others. Soon the nation's wealth was controlled by fewer and fewer businessmen who sought to protect their riches through trusts. Big business had been born, and its foremost goal was to protect itself. Railroad companies manipulated rates to favor the business of associates while extracting huge fees from unknown independent companies. They were represented in government by the Republican Party, while the South and poorer northerners, including immigrants, sought leadership in the Democratic Party. The Republicans usually won, but Democrat Grover Cleveland did serve an eight year term, and it is during his presidency that "The Bear" is set. These big business families also controlled the stock market, and their efforts to manipulate the market are blamed by many for the stock market crash of 1929. It is Faulkner's perspective in the early twentieth century, a period when industrialization began to seem overwhelming, that gives the destruction of deSpain's hunting grounds a certain urgency.

Economic Depression

Although "The Bear" is set in the late nineteenth century, Faulkner initially began writing the story during the Depression. Economic conditions in the post-war South were similar to those during the Depression. People in both eras lost land and family possessions, suffering an identity crisis in the process. The post-war South was ripe for "carpetbaggers," those who moved from the North seeking opportunities in business and land ownership. Many desperate Southerners felt they had no choice but to sell out, as Major deSpain does when he sells the land to the forestry company. The Great Depression uprooted families in many parts of the country, as people were forced to migrate to other cities in their search for work. Similarly, slaves freed during the Civil War soon began migrating, some to the industrialized north and others to land promised to them by the Union before Emancipation. Some slaves were skilled craftsman, and a few, like Fonsiba's intellectual husband, could read. Most freed slaves, however, had no education, no money, no work skills, and no understanding of how to manage for themselves. They were often the victims of fast-talking carpetbaggers, sometimes joining them in their quest for power and money. Some even opted to stay on the plantation, seeking a certain amount of security from their former owners in exchange for their loyalty. Tennie and her son Jim are among those of the McCaslin slaves who opt to stay with the McCaslin family.

Critical Overview

Faulkner's reputation has been largely based on his novels, rather than his short stories. Critics have found that Faulkner's novels are often more experimental and include a larger narrative sweep than his short stones. "The Bear," however, stands in contrast to this general rule. In the fourth section of the story, Faulkner employs a stream-of-conscious-ness narration to represent Isaac McCaslin's thought patterns. This fragmented narration is an example of the modernist approach Faulkner was using in his writing to portray modern existence in a new way. The story's unusual juxtaposition of episodes from very different points in time is another technique that Faulkner developed. These juxtapositions account for a large time period during which the saga of the McCaslin family unfolds. Finally, it is important to remember that the story is part of a larger work that Faulkner insisted should be read as an integrated novel. Thus, the attributes of Faulkner's fiction that steer admirers toward his novels rather than his short stories can all be found in "The Bear."

Early readers claimed "The Bear" was a simple hunting story, partly because the versions of the story published in 1935 and 1942 did not include the fourth section on McCaslin Edmonds and his descendants. When read with the fourth section, the tale remains an excellent example of the hunting story genre. Cleanth Brooks points out in his book William Faulkner: The Yoknapatawpha Country that today's urban citizens may not understand the depth of the work. Brooks asserts that' "The Bear" portrays a hunter who "loves the game that he pursues, and that his code of sportsmanship embodies—however inadequately and however crudely— a regard for his prey which is probably much deeper than that of those citizens who have no first-hand concern for the animals of the wilderness." "The Bear" is much more than a hunting story in many ways, and criticism tends to focus not on the peculiar relationship of the hunter to his prey, but on Isaac's moral struggle to deal with his ancestors' sins of slavery and incest. In general, critics have found Isaac incapable of his task of making restitution for his family's violations of human conduct. His efforts to find Tomey's grandchildren are only partially successful, and his refusal to accept the McCaslin farm as his rightful inheritance appears to many critics like more of an attempt to evade responsibility than to embrace it. Early critics generally were sympathetic to Isaac, noting most often the Biblical symbolism of his decision to follow the career path of the Nazarene. More recent articles seem to react against this initial viewpoint to find Isaac a weak and ineffective protester against the long-lasting effects of slavery and racism. Various explanations for Isaac's unwillingness—or inability—to act have been made, including the notion that his lack of a stable father figure has created his psychological inability to attain fully the manhood for which Sam Fathers and Cass have trained him.

Many critics have focused on part four of "The Bear." One aspect that consistently receives critical attention is the stance toward writing and narration that Faulkner takes in this section. Much of section four concerns the information Isaac finds in the books kept by Uncle Buck and Uncle Buddy, and later, Cass Edmonds. In his essay in *Faulkner and Race*, Michael Grimwood discusses Faulkner's writing technique in section four of the story. Grimwood notes Isaac's aversion to book learning, including

his cavalier attitude toward homework missed while hunting and his wary approach to the farm's ledgers. Ike's attitude is in contrast with Cass's upkeep of the ledgers and his insistence that Isaac keep up with his schoolwork. Books are found inadequate in comparison to the real-life learning that takes place in the woods. Even the Bible, Ike argues, is fallible, as it is the result of people's self-serving words. Thus Faulkner's story becomes a commentary on the shortcomings of the written word.

As with most of Faulkner's work, attempts to relate "The Bear" to Faulkner's own life in Mississippi can be found. A compelling argument is made by Charles Aiken to relate the story to the author's life in his essay "A Geographical Approach to William Faulkner's "The Bear'." Aiken compares the maps of Yoknapatawpha County that Faulkner provides to those areas where Faulkner himself learned to hunt. Faulkner's lifelong interest in hunting and his genuine concern for endangered wildlife areas have led critics to speculate on his attitude toward conservation of the land in the story. Aiken, for example, believes that Faulkner is arguing for acceptance of the inevitability of man's development of the land:' "The theme in 'The Bear' [is] that landscape change cannot be halted or even arrested when a landuse is outmoded and the altering forces set in motion." Others, such as Norman Rudich, disagree. In his essay "Faulkner and the Sin of Private Property," Rudich argues that the chronicle of land ownership and the related crimes of inhumanity in "The Bear" are a comment on the evils of private property. Faulkner's view of the land is a "mythopoeic, arcadian Biblical vision of a world which at creation belonged to none and belonged to all." Rudich continues: "private property had its origin in an original sin of expropriation of the primal wilderness, which sin and land were then transmitted from generation to generation as a cumulative curse, ripening gradually for retribution."

Criticism

- Critical Essay #1
- Critical Essay #2
- Critical Essay #3

BOOKRAGS

Critical Essay #1

Greg Barnhisel is an educator and Assistant Director of the Undergraduate Writing Center at the University of Austin, Texas. In the following essay, Barnhisel discusses the themes, narrative structure, and character development in Faulkner's story "TheBear."

William Faulkner is generally regarded as the most important writer to be produced by the American South. A native of Mississippi, Faulkner wrote about the land where he lived for most of his life. The great majority of Faulkner's work is set in the fictional Mississippi county of Yoknapatawpha (which, in turn, is based on the actual Lafayette County, home to the city of Oxford and the University of Mississippi). The influence of the past, the relationships between men, and the difficulties brought about by change are all recurrent themes in Faulkner's novels and stories. "The Bear" is a good example of a story that embodies all of these themes.

"The Bear" was originally published in 1935. In 1942, Faulkner revised it and included it in his book *Go Down, Moses*. Later, he insisted that' "The Bear" could not be fully understood unless it was read with the other stories in *Go Down, Moses* as a segment of a novel. In its seven stories, *Go Down, Moses* recounts many of the events in the life of Isaac (Ike) McCaslin, a member of one of Yoknapatawpha's three most important families. (The other families, representatives of which appear in "The Bear," are the Compsons and the Sutpens).

The complex narrative of' "The Bear" makes it difficult to sort out the family relations of the characters in the story. This is, of course, part of Faulkner's objective: through the tangled narration, he illustrates the often tangled genealogies of South complex narrative of 'The Bear' makes it difficult to sort out the family relations of the characters in the story,"

ern families, especially those involving illegitimate children who were the offspring of white men and slave women. Ike McCaslin, the main character, is the grandson of one of Yoknapatawpha's settlers and founders, Carothers McCaslin. Carothers' sons include Uncle Buck and Uncle Buddy, who, upon the death of their father in 1837, move into a log cabin on their plantation grounds and moved the plantation's slaves into the "big house. "Late in his life, Uncle Buck marries Sophonsiba Beauchamp and they produce Dee in 1867. Carothers also has a daughter married to an Edmonds, who is either the father or the grandfather (Faulkner does not say) of McCaslin "Cass" Edmonds. Cass, seventeen years older than Ike, in effect becomes Ike's father after Uncle Buck's death In "The Bear,1' we see Ike and Cass together through much of the story, and in the fourth section Cass teaches Dee many of the family' s secrets and much of its history. The other characters in "The Bear" include General Compson and Major de Spain, two of Yoknapatawpha's leading citizens; Sam Fathers, a hunting guide of Chickasaw descent, and Boon, another part-Chickasaw member of the hunting party; andAsh, the black cook for the hunting party.

The story recounts the efforts of Major de Spain's annual hunting party to track down Old Ben, an old and wily bear who is "ravaging the countryside." We see the hunt through Ike's eyes, and the first section of the story shifts in time through Ike's first expedition with the hunting party, in 1877, to the 1883 trip in which Old Ben is finally killed. Although the slaying of Old Ben is the climax of the story's action, it is not the story's focus. Instead, in the first half of the story we are confronted by the story of a boy's growing into manhood through learning the ancient ways of the hunter. On his first trip, the boy is not allowed to shoot his gun. On his second hunt, Sam Fathers teaches Ike that he must become a part of the wilderness before he earns the right to kill anything. That year, Ike discards his gun and goes off into the wilderness in search of Ben. Unable to lure the bear out of hiding, Ike leaves behind the trappings of civilization-his watch and compass-and is rewarded with a glimpse of the old bear. Subsequent trips bring the party closer to killing the bear, and in 1881 Sam captures a wild dog, whom he names "Lion," in hopes that he will help them corner the bear. Finally, in 1883 Lion and the hunters corner the bear. Ben kills the dog, but at the same time Boon jumps up on the bear's back and fatally stabs it. As the party prepares to return to town, Sam dies, and Ike suspects that Boon has "helped" in this.

The story of the hunt, although exciting, only takes up the first half (the first three sections) of "The Bear." After Sam dies, the narrative shifts. The sentences become extremely long, a characteristic Faulkner technique, and the narrator begins to discuss the early history of the county. This fourth section, stylistically the most difficult of the five, recounts Ike's investigation into his family' s history and leads up to his decision to renounce his inheritance. The majority of the chapter takes place in the McCaslin family commissary, where Ike and McCaslin Edmonds discuss many topics. Their discussions include the Chickasaws, who sold Ike's grandfather the land for his plantation, the legacy of slavery in the McCaslin family, and their convoluted family history. In addition, we see Ike working through his confusion about his own father: he cannot decide whether Cass, his grandfather Carothers, his spiritual father Sam, or Uncle Buck is his legitimate father.

Here, Faulkner is at his most ambitious. In this section, the past and the present co-exist almost without differentiation. In the same sentence, the actions of such figures as the Chickasaw chief Ikkemotubbe, Ike's Uncle Buddy, and Buddy's slave Tenme exert almost equal force on Ike. Similarly, Ike is ten, sixteen, and twenty-one, all in the space of a few lines. Faulkner uses this strategy to examine Ike's reaction to the pressure of the legacy that has been left to him. Ike, at age twenty-one, is finally legally able to inherit the McCaslin plantation, but he refuses. He is haunted by his abhorrence of slavery and the fields he now owns "whose laborers it still held in thrall '65 or no." Similarly, he is disgusted by his family's refusal to acknowledge that old Carothers not only fathered a daughter, Tomey, by his slave Eunice, but also incestu-ously fathered a son by Tomey. Finally he is deeply disturbed by the single-minded search for profit which the ownership of the plantation has fostered. Thus Ike refuses to take over the farm. By doing this, he hopes to cleanse himself of the stains that history has placed upon him.

The story is rich with meaning and resonance. Critics have drawn parallels of "The Bear" with ancient fertility myths, with the story of Christianity, and with Marxist critiques of modern consumer society. The connection of the hunt story to various myths is certainly an appealing one; many cultures have some type of a rite in which boys "come of age" by going off by themselves and hunting an animal. Ike learns not only how to "be a man" but also what man's "proper place" is within nature when Sam requires that he go without his gun before he can actually begin hunting. Major de Spain and General Compson also believe in the inherent value of the hunt as a learning tool. For both of them, killing Old Ben is not really the ultimate goal; until Boon kills the bear, they view the stalking of Ben (which always takes place on the last day of the hunting trip) almost as a ritual. When Boon kills Old Ben, Sam—who symbolizes the old ways and the ideal relation of man to nature—also dies. Boon here represents the predations of the modern world, his act symbolizing the severed relationship between man and nature. At the end, as he smashes his gun, he seems to have reached the impasse which Faulkner suggests all men will reach without an understanding of the proper role of man in nature.

The fact that Boon, the agent of the modern world, is sitting in the middle of a forest that is soon to be "harvested" by a Memphis lumber company demonstrates how the modern world, according to Faulkner, is willfully destroying itself.

To read "The Bear" as a Christian allegory requires us to view Sam Fathers as the Christ-figure. He shows Ike the way, "the code of the hunter as an alternative to the planation world." Two critics, R. W. B. Lewis and Lewis P. Simpson, discuss whether Ike McCashn's choice is the "key to salvation" for a fallen man. Lewis sees Ike's renunciation of his tainted family estate as a cleansing act in his essay in the Kenyon Review, but Simpson holds the contrary. According to Simpson's article in *Nine Essays in Modern Literature*, Faulkner believes that man's sins of slavery and of unquestioning faith in science and technology are of different moral types. He asserts that slavery, although a "curse," is rooted in man's inherent sinfulness, and is therefore less preventable. He further contends that our contemporary reliance on technology and belief in its power "separates man from both his sense of involvement with his fellow man and with nature and dehumanizes him." Ike repudiates the first sin, but simply by virtue of his being a member of modern society he cannot fully repudiate the second. The destruction of the land for the sake of profit is such an integral part of his own existence that we cannot see him as a savior figure.

Faulkner's treatment of race is extremely complex. There are as many explanations for his attitude towards the racial situation in the South as there are critics. We can attribute at least two solid beliefs to him: he abhors slavery, which he feels is an enduring curse not only upon the three races of the South (he here includes the Native Americans) but also upon the very land of Mississippi. He feels that the white race bears some responsibility for the black race's welfare (and this is epitomized by Ike's need to make sure his black cousins obtain the legacy which Carothers set aside for them). Faulkner's other belief is that he feels that the black race "endures." Ike tells McCaslin that "they [African Americans] are better than we are. Stronger than we are." "The Bear," in many

ways, is the story of Ike McCaslin's coming to terms with the racial inequity that his family helped to construct.

Although rooted in the particular historical conditions of post-Civil War Mississippi, Faulkner's story reaches beyond the limitations of historical fiction. In "The Bear," we have not only one of the greatest hunting stories in literature, but also a dissection of the condition of man in the fallen world. It is not necessary to agree with Faulkner on the pitiable condition of modern man to enjoy the story. However, the image of Boon ineffectually battering his own tools as he sits in a condemned wilderness speaks even more powerfully today than it did when Faulkner first created the scene.

Source: Greg Barnhisel, for *Short Stories for Students*, Gale Research, 1997

Critical Essay #2

In the following excerpt, Perluck explains that he does not believe that Isaac McCaslin acted honorably in rejecting his inheritance. Rather, he believes that McCaslin failed to accept responsibility.

The usual reading of "The Bear" makes of Isaac McCaslin a kind of saint who, by repudiating his inheritance—the desecrated land upon which a whole people has been violated— performs an act of expiation and atonement which is a model for those acts that must follow before the curse upon the land is lifted Bee's repudiation of the land, at twenty-one, with which the tortuous inner section of "The Bear" opens, and over which he and his cousin, McCaslin Edmonds, debate in the commissary, is seen in terms of what the reader understands Ike to have learned and attained under the influence of Sam Fathers in the untainted Wilderness, the "freedom and humility and pride." The story is of one man's repudiation of the forces of greed and materialism that have all but extinguished God's hope for man of freedom and generosity.

The whole sequence of the commissary, the Beauchamp legacy, and the later life of Isaac McCaslin, is thus ordinarily taken as a sort of complementary sequel to what may be called the hunt-narrative; Part IV in the total structure and intention of the work is a filling-out, past and future, of the "story proper," as it is sometimes regarded: the hunt-narrative and especially the episode of the fyce, in which the later renunciation, at twenty-one, is prefigured.

There is much, however, in this difficult portion of the work that suggests a contrary view. Instead of a romantic Christian pastoral of redemption, in which the repudiation of the land and earlier the apparently selfless rescue of the fyce from under the erect bear are seen as almost sanctifying gestures of renunciation, a searing tragedy of human desire and human limitation evolves, chiefly through ironic means. From McCaslin's scornful skepticism as he listens to Ike's account of God's circuitous providence, and the "lip-lift" of contempt when he realizes that even Ike does not wholly believe in his "freedom," to the almost hysterical laughter with which Part TV concludes, the principal effects are ironic.

The central thematic irony, however, upon which these effects are grounded, is slowly constructed of larger elements. The repudiation in the commissary is prefigured in the hunt-narrative; something of a parallel does develop between the selfless non-possession of Ike's gesture at twenty-one and the repudiation of passion earlier—that effort to preserve the idyll of the Big Woods, in the reluctance of both Ike and Sam Fathers to slay Old Ben. But the point of the parallel is not merely to provide background and extension to the "story-proper"; it is drawn and pressed home by McCaslin Edmonds on Ike because in both gestures there is weakness and something even sinister which cannot become clear to McCaslin, or to the reader, until the dense and complex drama of the debate in the commissary is enacted.

The terrible irony of Part IV develops in the growing awareness in the reader, as well as in the characters, of the discrepancy between what we and Ike supposed him to have achieved, to have attained to, and what in fact his repudiations actually represent. The whole inner section of "The Bear" reflects back on the hunt-narrative and forward into the last sequence: Ike's return at eighteen to the woods, which are being destroyed by the lumber company; his vague, troubled guilt at the sight of the nearly demented, grieving Boon. Coming where it does in the story structure, Part IV has the effect of making the reader, as it makes Ike and McCaslin, remember and painfully reinterpret the earlier events as of some dream-idyll of human perfection, of perhaps a kind of angelic pre-existence, now dissipated in the wakeful glare of the human reality. Slowly and relentlessly, Faulkner's intention takes hold in Part IV, in the tragic incompleteness of man, as the gulf is drawn between action, life as lived, and the memory of action and events, in which our dreams of life, our poems, are created.

"The Bear" is no Saint's Life; on the contrary, what it expresses is that there is no "freedom" in renunciation, no sanctity through repudiation—that actually there is no such thing as human sainthood as we have conceived it. If Isaac McCaslin is a saint at all, it is not in the traditional ascetic sense of a successful renunciation of the world and the flesh in atonement and expiation; it is rather a "sainthood" of unsuccess, an unwitting, unwilled elevation produced in the tragic *defeat* of spirit and soul in the "uncontrollable mystery" of the world which men and "saints" must live in perforce. In much the same way that [Franz] Kafka's Bucketrider is unaccountably (to him) "upraised" into the "regions of the icy mountains and [is] lost forever," Isaac McCaslin ascends without comprehending wherein that only "sainthood" man is allowed resides: in the anguished complex heart.' "The Bear" is a story of a renunciation that fails, as they all must. It is also the story of man's ineluctable fate of being only man. And on another level, it is a parable of man's pride, in his trying to be more than man, and of the evil this pride accomplishes in its condescending ascription of all that man does not want to see in himself to a certain few untouchables, the Boons of the world___

McCaslin tried to explain to Ike, by quoting the "Ode [on a Grecian Urn]," why Ike saved the fyce instead of killing Old Ben, or at least whatMcCaslin had thought then—that the humility and pride Ike had wanted to learn in order to become worthy of the Wilderness and of a manhood in which the Bear was hunted by men like Sam Fathers, Major de Spain, Walter Ewell, and McCaslin, that these he had just learned, had come to possess, through forbearance and selfless courage, through, in short, a kind of renunciation, non possession. McCaslin's purpose in quoting Keats had been to show Ike how we may pursue bravely and fiercely and yet not kill, out of pity and love; how we may love by not loving; how we may be proud and humble, fierce and gentle, at the same time; how by not possessing in the heart we may possess all....

Ike's failure to kill Old Ben was a way out, an escape from himself;... Keats had only helped him to repudiate, and so think he had freed himself from, what being human and alive in time imposes on a man. McCaslin hadn't told him that what we may know in the heart is not what we are allowed to live. The non-possession, the renunciations, and thus the "freedom" which may be realized in the heart— this Ike has tried to live. "Sam Fathers set me free,' * he protests to McCaslin... But the freedom he had indeed

obtained was only "freedom of the heart," which Sam Fathers showed him how to achieve by virtue of giving himself up to the Wilderness, as he does when he "relinquishes" his gun and compass and goes alone to see and be seen by Old Ben—much as Henry Fleming, in that other story of a boy's initiation into manhood, comes to touch the great god Death and discovers it is only death after all. He momentarily relinquishes self and pride, in effect—the way they are relinquished provisionally in a poem—the better to confront that naked red heart of the world, the Wilderness of the human heart, which is "free" only when it is so confronted and acknowledged. This "freedom" is from the blind, uncomprehending/ear of the "Wilderness" and its creatures, but is not, as Ike would desire it— a confusion that leads to his agony in the commissary—a freedom from the necessary human commitment in acts and time. The moral freedom to choose not to act does not exist, except in the heart, where it is not a moral but a spiritual or aesthetic freedom. Sam Fathers set Bee free only in the sense of his enabling him to look at all that a man can feel and do, all that the "Wilderness" contains; he could not free him from himself. So it was not the fyce that had kept him from shooting—out of love and forbearance; he had, in fact, blanched from that full sight of himself as a man, who at the same time he was humble and loved the thing he pursued, was a slayer and ravener.

The "poem," as it were, that Ike has tried to live is one in which his hunting of Old Ben but his not having to kill him is the chief symbol—as it is even now in the commissary. And it was very much like the girl and the youth on the Urn, although Ike had not quite been able to see the analogy. He has wished, Hamlet-like, to kill and yet not kill, to realize fully a state of "being" out of time, which is realized only in a play, in art, and in the complex heart. But the Prince must slay, the huntermust slay; they cannot, if they would be princes and hunters, preserve that moment of excruciated sensibility in the timeless drama of the heart. The "Old Free Fathers" were aware of this painful human paradox of action, in which man commits himself in the irrevocable, and they celebrated it in the sacramental gesture of grief and responsibility (but there was also pnde) for the life they spilled: a consecrating gesture—the smearing the warm blood of a youth's first kill on his forehead—which absolved a man from *regret* but not from *grief*....

Faulkner's meaning in "The Bear" is that if man would live, he must be prepared for the dying too; if he would love, he must also grieve for the spilled life that loving and living require. Simply to repudiate the spilling, to relinquish the grief, by relinquishing the passion, is to remove oneself from life, and from love, which, like the hunt, necessarily involves us in blood. There is no renunciation of life and the world which we can choose to make, and there can be no "acceptance" of the inevitabilities; we may only choose life. What we may renounce is only renunciation itself, and what we may attain to is not a regenerate state, sainthood, being, but our humanity. We gain life by "losing" it only in the sense of having it taken away, of trying to live what is in the heart, and failing. Renunciation, "acceptance," is to surrender life to live in the "pretty rooms" of sonnets ("and Isaac McCaslin, not yet Uncle Dee ... living in one small cramped fireless rented room in a Jefferson boarding-house ,.. with his kit of brand-new carpenter's tools ... the shotgun McCaslin had given him with his name engraved in silver... and the bright tin coffee-pot."

We prefer to think the Boons of this world do the slaying, and our renunciations are our way of allowing them to. We construct our "pretty rooms" right in the Wilderness where we play at virtue and perform our purification rites, just as Major de Spain, Walter Ewell, McCaslin Edmonds and the rest did each year. The Negroes and their white masters, at the camp site, lived under an entirely different dispensation from the one which ordinarily prevailed in town, in real life, where they were virtually slaves. In the Big Woods they could play at being untainted, guiltless—there one felt free. The pursuit of Old Ben over the years is unsuccessful, not merely because he is a wily old beast, almost supernatural, but because they didn't want to kill him, and not killing him is the ritual of purification; by this, and by the altered relationship of Negro and white master, they could free themselves, for a while at least. Sam Fathers had begun, long before, to live at the camp site all year round, but when they approach him after he has collapsed, he murmurs, "Let me out, master," knowing that only death can really free him, that he hasn't been free at all in the white man's lodge and woods. The Boons, with the hard button eyes—the insensitive, un-human destroyers and raveners, as we conceive them—are there at the last, almost by design, to shatter the pretty glass room of this dream of redemption: we create them and then sacrifice them in our condescensions and our renunciations in this last act of the ritual....

Source: Herbert A Perluck, "'The Bear': An Unromantic Reading," in *Religious Perspectives in Faulkner's Fiction: Yoknapatawpha and Beyond*, edited by J. Robert Barth, S J, University of Notre Dame Press, 1972, pp. 173-201.

Critical Essay #3

In the portion of the review excerpted below, Lehan, an assistant professor at UCLA, interprets "The Bear" in much the same way as a poem would be analyzed. He also focuses on the relationships between several characters, especially Lion and Boon, Sam Fathers and the bear.

Faulkner's "The Bear," published *in The Saturday Evening Post* and in *Go Down, Moses*, has received its share of critical explication, and the pattern and meaning of the novel seems to have been thoroughly discussed. Certainly there is much that can be taken for granted: the bear is a symbol of nature, its death symbolizes the loss of the wilderness and all the wilderness represents, and the wilderness seems to represent a kind of Emersonian realm where man and nature are spiritually and emotionally at one, an Edenic world before the Fall where time does not exist and where, like Keats' s Grecian urn, one is not subject to the exigencies of time. Ike McCaslin, in fact, has to divest himself of watch and compass before he can see the bear, because these man-made instruments impose a mechanical and unnatural order upon nature; and Dee sees the bear at the same spot where he left the watch and compass, as if time and space begin with the bear because he encompassed both.

The critics have so focused on the larger and more engrossing matters of the story—the ritual aspect of the hunt, the symbolic meaning of the bear's death, the moral connection between the "sins" of Carothers McCaslin and the loss of the wilderness—that matters of technique, the "telling " of the story, have received little attention and, as a result, much of the meaning of the novel has gone unnoticed or is still subject to argument. Meaning in' "The Bear" stems, at least in part, from Faulkner's use of descriptive detail, from verbal associations, which interrelate characters and extend the theme of the novel imagistically, as if' "The Bear" were a poem.

Critics, for example, have failed to notice that Faulkner makes a verbal connection between Lion, the dog, and Boon Hogganbeck. When we first see Lion, trapped in the emptied corn-crib which has been baited with the colt's carcass, he is smashing with tremendous power against the deadfall door. His force is that of nature itself, a cold and malignant element of nature, diametrically removed from what the bear represents. When Lion is slowly and painfully tamed, it seems as if nature has been turned back upon itself. If the bear is a pristine and uncorrupted part of nature, Lion stands for the forces of nature which have been harnessed by man. A vicious, wild dog, he is finally tamed by man and, like a machine subject to its maker, he is turned against the wilderness.

It is for this reason that Lion is described as if he were a man-made object; the men .peering between the logs into the cage see an animal almost the color of a gun or pistol barrel." The dog "stood, and they could see it now—part mastiff, something of Airedale and something of a dozen other strains probably, better than thirty inches at the shoulders and weighing as they guessed almost ninety pounds, with cold yellow eyes and a tremendous chest and over all that strange color like a blued gun-barrel."

It is these descriptive details that link Lion and Boon in the novel. Unlike Ike or Sam Fathers, Boon is not really a woodsman, a member of the initiate, not a high priest in the annual ritual hunt. Like Lion, Boon is once removed from both the pristine wilderness and civilization. He is completely out of place in Memphis, where he gets drunk and suffers from a severe cold, and yet he lacks the capacity to relate spiritually with the wilderness. He is in a kind of no-man’s land, and it is significant that at the end of the novel, when the wilderness has been destroyed by the lumber company, Boon becomes a deputy sheriff. Like Lion, in other words, he eventually becomes the tool of men, a corruptible part of nature, "tamed" by society, and turned against nature. Lion and Boon thus come to represent nature turned back upon itself in an act of destruction. It is thematically appropriate that Boon and Lion have a kind of "love affair." Ike watches when Boon touches Lion "as if Lion were a woman—or perhaps Boon was the woman. That was more like it—the big, brave sleepy-seeming dog which, as Sam Fathers said, cared about no man and no thing; and the violent, insensitive, hard-faced man with his touch of remote Indian blood and the mind almost of a child." And it is further appropriate that Faulkner describes Boon in exactly the same way that he describes Lion. Where Lion's coat has "that strange color like a blued gun-barrel," Boon has a "blue stubble on his face like the filings from a new gun-barrel." This is not mere rhetoric, mere accidental detail. In his imagination, Faulkner reconciled Boon and Lion; the two serve the same thematic purpose in the novel, and Faulkner bridged this connection and extended meaning in "The Bear" through such descriptive detail—detail that the reader must first interrelate, just as one has to go through the imagery of a [John] Donne poem before he can come to its final meaning.

When Boon and Lion kill the bear, the forces of nature corrupted by a mechanized civilization have been turned against an elemental and pristine nature. Sam Fathers, who like the bear is also uncorrupted, dies when the bear dies, and it is once again significant that Boon is die agent of his death, that Boon kills him at Sam's own request.

The death of both the bear and of Sam Fadiers represents the passing of an old order. Their death occurs simultaneously with the loss of the wilderness as it is ruthlessly raped by the timber company. The novel, in fact, opens on this theme, Faulkner describing "that doomed wilderness whose edges were being constantly and punily gnawed at by men with plows and axes who feared it because it was wilderness." The death of the bear parallels, to be more exact, what happened to the South after the Civil War when the older agrarian order was disrupted, when an industrialized North tned to make it over in its own image. Boon and Lion destroy the bear, just as the timber company, the spirit of industry, destroys the wilderness—and again Faulkner makes this point through descriptive detail. In the passage describing the death of the bear, perhaps one of the most moving passages in contemporary fiction, he describes Boon and Lion, both astride the bear, Boon with his knife probing for the bear's heart, the knife rising and falling once:

It fell just once For an instant they almost resembled a piece of statuary [cf. Keats's Grecian urn]: the clinging dog, the bear, the man astride its back, working and probing the buried blade Then they went down, pulled over backward, by Boon's weight, Boon underneath. It was the bear's back which reappeared first but at once Boon was astride

it again He had never released the knife and again the boy saw the almost infinitesimal movement of his arm and shoulder as he probed and sought; then the bear surged erect, raising with it the man and the dog too, and turned and still carrying the man and the dog it took two or three steps toward the woods on its hind feet as a man would have walked and crashed down It didn't collapse, crumple It fell all of a piece, as a tree falls, so that all three of them, man dog and bear, seemed to bounce once, (italics mine)

The death of the bear and the loss of the wilderness are thus thematically spliced through descriptive detail. The bear did not fall, it "crashed down," as a "tree falls," and the death of the bear and the loss of the forest become one.

Source: Richard Lehan, "Faulkner's Poetic Prose: Style and Meaning in 'The Bear'," *College English*, Vol. 27, No 3, December, 1965, pp 243^7

Adaptations

"The Bear" was made into a motion picture by Frank Stokes in 1972, although the adaptation does not include section four of the story. It can be found on videocassette, distributed by AIMS Media

A 1980 motion picture of "The Bear" was filmed by Encyclopaedia Britannica Educational Corporation. This version does not include section four of the story. Available on videocassette.

Barr Films published a similar video in 1981, again focusing on the work as a hunting story.

A reel-to-reel version was written and produced by Bernard Wilets in 1980 and distributed by BFA Educational Media.

There is a cassette tape of many of Faulkner's stones. The cassette is published as The Stories of William Faulkner, Parts I and II, read by Wolfram Kandinsky and Michael Kramer, Books on Tape, 1994.

Topics for Further Study

Investigate the Native American Chickasaw tribe to determine their original tribal grounds. What happened to the Chickasaws? Is there a tribal community still in the area today?

Find out what was on the site of your town or city before the present community was established. Was it a wilderness area? Were there any aboriginal tribes living there? Who first settled the area?

Research the wildlife of Mississippi to find out what species of bear Old Ben is. Compare the typical characteristics of bears in this area of the country with Old Ben's behavior. Is Faulkner's portrayal realistic?

Do some reading on the lives of slaves who were freed during the Civil War. What sorts of problems did they have to face in their new lives? What did being "free" mean for them?

Compare and Contrast

1880s: The Thirteenth Amendment, abolishing slavery, and the Fourteenth Amendment, guaranteeing civil liberty, are ratified by all states.

1942: The Georgia Contract Labor Act is overturned by the Supreme Court, which declares that the act of "peonage" it sanctions is a violation of the anti-slavery amendment.

Today: All peoples are protected under the law from slavery, though immigrants and people of color are often the victim of civil liberty infringements.

1882: Standard Oil forms a trust to secure its monopoly of the industry and eliminate competition. Other industries soon follow, causing the loss of many jobs.

1941: Ford Motor Company signs its first contract with a labor union. A wage increase is awarded by General Motors in an effort to avoid strikes.

Today: Big business continues to battle against government intervention and labor unions in order to maximize profits and reduce any external regulations that interfere with those profits.

1883: Theodore Roosevelt begins buying up ranches in the Dakota Territory. In 1887, his interest in hunting and the outdoors leads him to form the Boone-Crockett Club, named after two legendary woodsmen.

1933: The first U.S. textbook on game management is published by Aldo Leopold, reflecting society's growing concern with the wise and effective management of America's land, animals, and resources.

Today: Lumber companies in the Pacific Northwest seek legal protection allowing them to cut old-growth forests, even though their actions may cause the extinction of the spotted owl.

1887: The Dawes General Allotment Act is enacted, allowing two-thirds of Indian reservation lands to fall into the hands of whites.

1934: The Wheeler-Howard Act, also known as the Indian Reorganization Act, attempts to rectify deplorable conditions on many reservations that are blamed on the earlier Dawes General Allotment Act of 1887.

Today: The Chickasaw tribe, which had approximately 4,000 members when it was forced to move to Oklahoma in the 1830s, boasts 25,000 descendants today.

What Do I Read Next?

Go Down, Moses is the 1942 novel by William Faulkner in which "The Bear" first appeared in its entirety. Each of the stories within the novel center around the McCaslin clan, starting with Uncle Buck and Uncle Buddy and ending when "Uncle Ike" is an old man.

Jack London's 1910 novel *White Fang* tells the story of a boy coming of age in the wilderness of Alaska near the turn of the century. The enduring lessons of the wilderness are taught by a very special dog who is also part wolf.

Published in 1845, the autobiographical *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* is a good starting point for investigating slavery from the slaves' point of view. Douglass's account is relevant to the plight of all slaves in any time period.

Faulkner was an influential figure for Nobel prize-winner Toni Morrison. Her 1977 novel, *Song of Solomon*, is the account of a youth named Milkman Dead, whose investigations into his family tree take him, among other places, on a hunting trip.

Winesburg, Ohio, published in 1919 by Faulkner's

friend Sherwood Anderson, is the coming-of-age story of young George Willard, whose upbringing in a small Midwest town is told in a collection of short stories. George's neighbors all confide their personal stories to this budding young journalist, an act that unifies the disparate members of the town into a cohesive whole.

Ernest Hemingway's short story "Big Two-Hearted River" was first published in his 1925 collection *In Our Time*. The story details the return of Nick Adams to a familiar fishing camp of his youth, where he goes to heal after surviving injuries sustained in World War I.

Margaret Mitchell's 1939 novel *Gone with the Wind*, written about the time that Faulkner was reworking "The Bear," makes an interesting contrast to the stark portrayal of the South that Faulkner provides. Mitchell's plantations are magnificent, gracious icons of genteel Southern living. Her portrayal of slaves reduces them to picturesque stereotypes of ignorant but faithful servantry.

Further Study

Adams, Richard P. "Focus on William Faulkner's 'The Bear*. Moses and the Wilderness," in *American Dreams, American Nightmares*, edited by David Madden, Southern Illinois University Press, 1970, pp 129-135.

This article finds Ike unable to set anyone free, in spite of his own belief that it is his responsibility to do so.

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BOOKRAGS

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Introduction

Purpose of the Book

The purpose of Short Stories for Students (SSfS) is to provide readers with a guide to understanding, enjoying, and studying novels by giving them easy access to information about the work. Part of Gale's□For Students□ Literature line, SSfS is specifically designed to meet the curricular needs of high school and undergraduate college students and their teachers, as well as the interests of general readers and researchers considering specific novels. While each volume contains entries on □classic□ novels

frequently studied in classrooms, there are also entries containing hard-to-find information on contemporary novels, including works by multicultural, international, and women novelists.

The information covered in each entry includes an introduction to the novel and the novel's author; a plot summary, to help readers unravel and understand the events in a novel; descriptions of important characters, including explanation of a given character's role in the novel as well as discussion about that character's relationship to other characters in the novel; analysis of important themes in the novel; and an explanation of important literary techniques and movements as they are demonstrated in the novel.

In addition to this material, which helps the readers analyze the novel itself, students are also provided with important information on the literary and historical background informing each work. This includes a historical context essay, a box comparing the time or place the novel was written to modern Western culture, a critical overview essay, and excerpts from critical essays on the novel. A unique feature of SSfS is a specially commissioned critical essay on each novel, targeted toward the student reader.

To further aid the student in studying and enjoying each novel, information on media adaptations is provided, as well as reading suggestions for works of fiction and nonfiction on similar themes and topics. Classroom aids include ideas for research papers and lists of critical sources that provide additional material on the novel.

Selection Criteria

The titles for each volume of SSfS were selected by surveying numerous sources on teaching literature and analyzing course curricula for various school districts. Some of the sources surveyed included: literature anthologies; Reading Lists for College-Bound Students: The Books Most Recommended by America's Top Colleges; textbooks on teaching the novel; a College Board survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; a National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) survey of novels commonly studied in high schools; the NCTE's Teaching Literature in High School: The Novel;and the Young Adult Library Services Association (YALSA) list of best books for young adults of the past twenty-five years. Input was also solicited from our advisory board, as well as educators from various areas. From these discussions, it was determined that each volume should have a mix of classic novels (those works commonly taught in literature classes) and contemporary novels for which information is often hard to find. Because of the interest in expanding the canon of literature, an emphasis was also placed on including works by international, multicultural, and women authors. Our advisory board memberseducational professionals helped pare down the list for each volume. If a work was not selected for the present volume, it was often noted as a possibility for a future volume. As always, the editor welcomes suggestions for titles to be included in future volumes.

How Each Entry Is Organized

Each entry, or chapter, in SSfS focuses on one novel. Each entry heading lists the full name of the novel, the author's name, and the date of the novel's publication. The following elements are contained in each entry:

- Introduction: a brief overview of the novel which provides information about its first appearance, its literary standing, any controversies surrounding the work, and major conflicts or themes within the work.
- Author Biography: this section includes basic facts about the author's life, and focuses on events and times in the author's life that inspired the novel in question.
- Plot Summary: a factual description of the major events in the novel. Lengthy summaries are broken down with subheads.
- Characters: an alphabetical listing of major characters in the novel. Each character name is followed by a brief to an extensive description of the character's role in the novel, as well as discussion of the character's actions, relationships, and possible motivation. Characters are listed alphabetically by last name. If a character is unnamed□for instance, the narrator in Invisible Man-the character is listed as □The Narrator□ and alphabetized as □Narrator.□ If a character's first name is the only one given, the name will appear alphabetically by that name. □ Variant names are also included for each character. Thus, the full name □Jean Louise Finch□ would head the listing for the narrator of To Kill a Mockingbird, but listed in a separate cross-reference would be the nickname □Scout Finch.□
- Themes: a thorough overview of how the major topics, themes, and issues are addressed within the novel. Each theme discussed appears in a separate subhead, and is easily accessed through the boldface entries in the Subject/Theme Index.
- Style: this section addresses important style elements of the novel, such as setting, point of view, and narration; important literary devices used, such as imagery, foreshadowing, symbolism; and, if applicable, genres to which the work might have belonged, such as Gothicism or Romanticism. Literary terms are explained within the entry, but can also be found in the Glossary.
- Historical Context: This section outlines the social, political, and cultural climate in which the author lived and the novel was created. This section may include descriptions of related historical events, pertinent aspects of daily life in the culture, and the artistic and literary sensibilities of the time in which the work was written. If the novel is a historical work, information regarding the time in which the novel is set is also included. Each section is broken down with helpful subheads.
- Critical Overview: this section provides background on the critical reputation of the novel, including bannings or any other public controversies surrounding the work. For older works, this section includes a history of how the novel was first received and how perceptions of it may have changed over the years; for more recent novels, direct quotes from early reviews may also be included.
- Criticism: an essay commissioned by SSfS which specifically deals with the novel and is written specifically for the student audience, as well as excerpts from previously published criticism on the work (if available).

- Sources: an alphabetical list of critical material quoted in the entry, with full bibliographical information.
- Further Reading: an alphabetical list of other critical sources which may prove useful for the student. Includes full bibliographical information and a brief annotation.

In addition, each entry contains the following highlighted sections, set apart from the main text as sidebars:

- Media Adaptations: a list of important film and television adaptations of the novel, including source information. The list also includes stage adaptations, audio recordings, musical adaptations, etc.
- Topics for Further Study: a list of potential study questions or research topics dealing with the novel. This section includes questions related to other disciplines the student may be studying, such as American history, world history, science, math, government, business, geography, economics, psychology, etc.
- Compare and Contrast Box: an at-a-glance comparison of the cultural and historical differences between the author's time and culture and late twentieth century/early twenty-first century Western culture. This box includes pertinent parallels between the major scientific, political, and cultural movements of the time or place the novel was written, the time or place the novel was set (if a historical work), and modern Western culture. Works written after 1990 may not have this box.
- What Do I Read Next?: a list of works that might complement the featured novel or serve as a contrast to it. This includes works by the same author and others, works of fiction and nonfiction, and works from various genres, cultures, and eras.

Other Features

SSfS includes The Informed Dialogue: Interacting with Literature, a foreword by Anne Devereaux Jordan, Senior Editor for Teaching and Learning Literature (TALL), and a founder of the Children's Literature Association. This essay provides an enlightening look at how readers interact with literature and how Short Stories for Students can help teachers show students how to enrich their own reading experiences.

A Cumulative Author/Title Index lists the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series.

A Cumulative Nationality/Ethnicity Index breaks down the authors and titles covered in each volume of the SSfS series by nationality and ethnicity.

A Subject/Theme Index, specific to each volume, provides easy reference for users who may be studying a particular subject or theme rather than a single work. Significant subjects from events to broad themes are included, and the entries pointing to the specific theme discussions in each entry are indicated in boldface.

Each entry has several illustrations, including photos of the author, stills from film adaptations (if available), maps, and/or photos of key historical events.

Citing Short Stories for Students

When writing papers, students who quote directly from any volume of Short Stories for Students may use the following general forms. These examples are based on MLA style; teachers may request that students adhere to a different style, so the following examples may be adapted as needed. When citing text from SSfS that is not attributed to a particular author (i.e., the Themes, Style, Historical Context sections, etc.), the following format should be used in the bibliography section:

□Night.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 234-35.

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Miller, Tyrus. Critical Essay on □Winesburg, Ohio.□ Short Stories for Students. Ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski. Vol. 4. Detroit: Gale, 1998. 335-39.

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Malak, Amin. □Margaret Atwood's □The Handmaid's Tale and the Dystopian Tradition,□ Canadian Literature No. 112 (Spring, 1987), 9-16; excerpted and reprinted in Short Stories for Students, Vol. 4, ed. Marie Rose Napierkowski (Detroit: Gale, 1998), pp. 133-36.

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Adams, Timothy Dow. □Richard Wright: □Wearing the Mask,□ in Telling Lies in Modern American Autobiography (University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 69-83; excerpted and reprinted in Novels for Students, Vol. 1, ed. Diane Telgen (Detroit: Gale, 1997), pp. 59-61.

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The editor of Short Stories for Students welcomes your comments and ideas. Readers who wish to suggest novels to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions, are cordially invited to contact the editor. You may contact the editor via email at: ForStudentsEditors@gale.com. Or write to the editor at:

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